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SUBJECT: FPI Insistent on Mambe's Resignation, CEI Reconfiguration

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Embassy Abidjan; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The FPI remains adamant that the current impasse over the electoral list cannot be resolved unless Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) President Robert Mambe resigns. The FPI also wants a reconfiguration of the CEI. In a February 9 meeting, Ambassador told FPI representatives that Mambe's fate is not the central concern; there is no evidence that the provisional list has been compromised and the process needs to move forward. The Ambassador clearly stated the FPI was at risk of being blamed for any further electoral delays. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador met February 9 with FPI President Affi N'Guessan at the latter's request to discuss the FPI's position on the current electoral crisis (reftels). He was accompanied by three other key FPI members: Laurent Akoun, who handles DDR issues; Kouassi Moise Lida, former defense minister and presidential advisor; and Marie-Odette Lorougnon, who is responsible for women's affairs. DCM and Pol/Econ Chief were also in attendance. N'Guessan spent much of the 90-minute meeting vilifying CEI President Mambe, calling him a traitor who was defying the authority of the state by refusing to resign, and blaming him for the current stalemate. N'Guessan called for a "neutral" party to replace Mambe and a rebalancing of the CEI to make it a less political body. To this end, he demanded that the nine non-voting CEI commissioners be given voting rights (Note: Ref c details the composition of the CEI. End Note)

¶3. (C) The Ambassador pulled no punches in telling N'Guessan that progress toward elections should continue as quickly as possible, and that the actions of one man should not be allowed to derail the process. She noted that Ivoirians are losing patience, and that the hope she had seen throughout the country when the provisional voters' list was published in November 2009 would be dashed if the process was seen to be going backwards. The international community was also anxious that elections be held as quickly as possible, and the FPI risked to be seen as the stumbling block. She acknowledged that Mambe had made mistakes, but noted that there were two sides to the story (Ambassador heard Mambe's on February 5). Mambe's fate is an internal issue to be decided by the Ivoirians. The critical point was that it was clear that the integrity of the provisional list had never been comprised, so a way forward must be found.

¶4. (C) N'Guessan reacted defensively to the Ambassador's analysis, stating that Ivoirians knew best how to move their country forward. Lorougnon complained that Cote d'Ivoire was not being allowed to implement its own constitution by refusing foreigners the right to vote, and that the FPI was powerless against the armed groups who were pursuing their own political agendas. N'Guessan continued to focus on Mambe's actions,

dismissed the Prime Minister's observation committees out of hand, and rejected the Ambassador's suggestion that an individual not aligned with any party, perhaps even someone from outside Cote d'Ivoire, be considered to head the CEI should Mambe resign.

15. (C) Comment: This meeting reconfirmed the FPI's aggressive agenda to replace Mambe. N'Guessan and his colleagues were clearly not in the listening mode, ignoring the fact that the list had not been compromised, and focusing only on replacing Mambe and reconfiguring the CEI before anything else could be accomplished. Barring a radical change in their perspective, it is hard to see how the process can move forward unless Mambe resigns; finding a successor that all parties can agree to will probably take weeks. Of even more concern is the FPI's demand that the structure of the CEI, which was the result of months of negotiations, be significantly changed by allowing the technical commissioners the right to vote. (Note: Most of these commissioners are likely pro-FPI, which would tilt the current, opposition-heavy makeup of the CEI in the FPI's favor. End Note) The FPI's desire to balance the CEI politically is understandable, but their proposal will not make the CEI more independent and could result in frequent deadlocks that the politicians will be called upon to resolve. N'Guessan's claims that the FPI is the helpless victim of the political machinations of the opposition and the Prime Minister would be laughable, if they were not a sign that any compromise is unlikely to come from
STANLEY